INTERMOUNTAIN TRAILS

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FOREST IN FOCUS: Caribou-Targhee National Forest

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest and Curlew National Grasslands stretch across southeastern Idaho and western Wyoming from Montana to Utah. Bordering Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, the Forest and Grasslands serve as a gateway to the Greater Yellowstone Area. At just over 3 million acres, it is a vast area, with spectacular scenery and immense diversity from High Mountain peaks to grasslands.

Brent Larson
Forest Supervisor

As the Forest Supervisor of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, I am continually amazed by how much work is accomplished as a result of a dedicated workforce, committed partners and stakeholders that strive to make a difference in our ability to maintain and protect their National Forests. This month, I am proud to highlight just a few of the trail projects that would not have been possible without the assistance of individuals, groups, and other agencies. These are just a few of the projects that demonstrate how partnerships make a difference in our ability to provide opportunities for the use and enjoyment of our national forests.

I invite all to come to southeast Idaho and enjoy the spectacular scenery, diversity, and history of the Caribou-Targhee NF and Curlew Grasslands. It truly is a special place.

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TRAIL STORIES

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TRAIL STORIES

The Continental Divide Trail

The Continental Divide Trail, fondly known as the CDT, extends from Mexico to Canada. The 3,100 miles runs along the spine of the Rocky Mountains. In 1978, Congress designated the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail for hiking, horseback riding, quiet recreation and conservation of natural, cultural and historic resources. The trail is not yet complete, however forests are diligently working on it. A portion of this trail is found on the north end of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

The Idaho portion of the CDT leaves Yellowstone National Park and runs along the Pitchstone Plateau between Idaho and Montana. This portion of the trail follows an old logging road that is slated for reconstructed in the next few years. This will bring the trail off the road. The trail navigates the Henry's Lake Mountains to the Centennial Mountains and traverses this entire range. The trail weaves back and forth between Montana and Idaho. A pproximately 53 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail runs through the Ashton/Island Park Ranger District. Access points for the trail are Forest Service Roads #066 Black Canyon, #057 Targhee Creek, #056 Divide, #042 Keg Springs, #327 East Dry Creek, and Highway 87 at Raynolds Pass.

Hikers will encounter wildlife such as grizzly bears, elk, and if they are lucky a wolverine or two. The alpine wildflowers are all along this trail as are whitebark pine forests. High elevation lakes are along the way, where you can enjoy a refreshing dip in the water. Evidence of past timber management activities can be seen on the forest adjacent to Yellowstone National Park.

Be Prepared for Inclement Weather

Taking warm clothing can not only make your outdoor experience safer, but more comfortable and enjoyable.

SAFETY TIP

Summer Improvements on the Continental Divide Trail

Approximately 50 miles of the Continental Divide Trail (CDT) winds its way across the northern boundary of the Dubois Ranger District. It varies in difficulty from meandering through old timber stands on the east to open, wind-blown slopes to the west. This provides varying degrees of difficulty for hikers. This diverseness in the trail complexity is what draws hiking enthusiasts to Dubois Ranger District.

The Montana Wilderness Association (MWA) has played an intricate part in helping to maintain the CDT through their volunteer program during these times of dwindling federal budgets.

The MWA volunteers spent two weeks on the Dubois District working in two completely different environmental landscapes. The week of June 16-21 saw a group of two volunteers working the trail from the Mill Fork of Middle Creek to Shineberger Creek. The trail is truly a Continental Divide Trail as it follows the narrow spine forming the border between Idaho and Montana. Because the trail sits atop the narrow divide, there is little need to disturb the ground by scraping the sparse ground vegetation to form the traditional tread. Vegetation consists of sage brush, a variety of grasses and a multitude of wildflowers. If you are looking for trees, you won't find them, but the view is breathtaking.

The MWA group for the week of June 23-29 concentrated their efforts on the CDT from Aldous Lake to the eastern Dubois District boundary.

The group spent the week clearing downed timber from the trail, cutting brush, installing drainage relief and increasing signage of the trail. They also reestablished the trail tread through the dry meadow areas where the vegetation has infringed to the point the trail was unrecognizable.

Thanks to the help of organizations like the MWA, the Dubois Ranger District is able to keep popular trails like the CDT open and safe for the public to enjoy.

By Ron Schlader

Dubois District Ranger

Horse Power on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest

The Palisades Ranger District has incorporated horse drawn equipment to complete trail projects since 2004. District Trails Coordinator Dave Woodcock first introduced this into the program. Dave was looking for ways to increase trail tread production and reduce crew costs. After running hand crews for several years it was decided to give it a go.

After a lengthy process of contacting other Forests that utilized this type of equipment, the District began putting together a number of implements to see what worked the best. This included a hillside plow and a small grader. The first year it was noted that what would take a 4-person hand crew all summer to do could be done in most instances in just a couple of weeks. Currently the implements used include an Oliver hillside plow, combination plow/grader, ripper/grader and a trail scoop for soil excavating. The equipment breaks down and is easily loaded on the Districts pack stock to take into the backcountry. The District has two Belgian draft horses, Benny and Junior, for pulling the equipment and they have logged many miles of tread reconstruction over the past nine years. This year alone the District trail crew will work about twenty miles of single-track trail improving tread throughout the District. The majority of work is done in late spring and early summer when the moisture is still in the ground and the soil will roll off the plow and grader, following the snowline up until the soil is to dry. In the fall when we begin to pick up moisture, we will begin again. The trail crew has also used the ripper and scoop to aid in back filling bridge approaches on three different projects where limited access made it impossible to use motorized equipment. The gentle giants are routinely used to skid logs and bridge stringers on projects where other means will not work. Through the innovative use of this equipment and horsepower, the District has accomplished many trail projects and will continue to improve the districts trail system for many years to come.

One of the biggest challenges has been finding and training employees in the art of driving and handling the work horses. The teamster trade is a lost art and a valuable skill the crewmembers enjoy.

The Backcountry Trails of Southeast Idaho

Beginning in 2011, recreation staffs from the Montpelier and Soda Springs Ranger Districts have been spending a few weeks each summer focusing on the large non-motorized recreational area in the northern part of the Soda District. Bounded on the west by the historic Caribou Mountain and to the east by Wyoming, this greater area contains over 100 miles of maintained trails open only to foot, horse and mountain bike travel. Highway 34 bisects the area and the larger expanse of forest to the north is approximately 50 square miles of backcountry.

September is the busiest time of the year in this remote backcountry area. Archery hunters pursuing trophy elk come from far and wide, with as many as 10 different states represented over a two-week period. They travel the trails by horseback, backpacking and even bicycles. The area is popular with these hunters because of the lack of motorized access and remote elk habitat.

Crossing Tincup Creek (September 2012) — At the South Fork of Tincup trailhead along Highway34, a new bridge replaces the old. This trailhead accesses approximately 30 miles of non-motorized trails.

The Eastern Idaho RAC (Secure Rural Schools Act, Title II Project Award) funded the horse and pedestrian bridge. Local Forest employees accomplished the work.

Volunteer Trail Work Day on Pole Canyon Trail

For the last 10 years in a row, Teton Valley Trails and Pathways (TVTAP) and the Teton Basin Ranger District host a series of three volunteer workdays during the summers. These projects provide an opportunity for the community to come together and improve trails, which many people enjoy throughout the year. Another benefit for all parties is the opportunity for meaningful conversations about what the public wants to see happen in the recreation program and letting them know what is slated in the near future for District projects.

On June 15, the first workday project of the year took place at the Pole Canyon Trail in Victor, ID. Three reroutes of the trail were planned, scouted and prepared by the District Trail Crew ahead of time. The combined effort of over 35 volunteers and 8 Forest Service employees completed this project in one day. The reroutes were chosen to create a more sustainable trail that is enjoyed by mountain bikers, hikers, horseback riders and motorcyclists.

According to District Ranger Jay Pence; "The partnership that the District has with Teton Valley Trails and Pathways has allowed us to tap the energy of many dedicated trail users, and put it to use on significant projects that improve trails for everyone. The non-profit group, which is a member of the National Forest Foundation, is also able to partner with our local businesses to provide additional volunteer incentives. It is truly an amazing accomplishment". Tim Adams, Executive Director for TVTAP also shares that, "for 10 years we have instilled in our volunteers the necessity to give back to the great resource they use. The volunteers that come to the trail day are truly a cross section of the users including equestrians, mountain bikers, motorcyclist, hikers, runners, etc. This group understands that well-built trails using sustainable methods will not only enhance the user experience, but assure the trails will be around for generations to enjoy".

A trail for the future that honors our past- Justice Trail

Pocatello is the base camp of choice for trail enthusiasts of all types. The local Westside District offers over 250 miles of Forest system trails that weave through the foothills and high country of Mink Creek, just southwest of town. The City of Pocatello also manages fifty miles of trail on the west bench just above city neighborhoods.

Pocatello's City Creek trails and the Forest Service trails provide an expansive playground for families, dog walkers, fitness runners, after-work OHV cruisers, stock users and a tight group of avid mountain bikers. In 2007 Dave Maguire, a local mountain biker and hiker, approached Westside District staff to discuss the possibility of creating a new trail that would directly connect the two trail systems. The two trail systems were linked, but the connection was several miles west of the front country; not very enticing for non-motorized travel.

When the local trail users gathered together to create a management plan for the City Creek Trails the need for a linked trail system became apparent. Westside District Ranger Jeff Hammes made it clear that a new travel route would only be considered if the trail club, City Creek Trail Users Group or CCTUG, agreed to build, maintain and police the proposed connector trail.

After a cooperative agreement was signed between the trail group and the District, trail construction began in the spring of 2012. Volunteers were coordinated and mobilized by CCTUG President, Richard Newcomb. The first miles of new trail were built with a Forest Service trail cat, the remaining five miles were built by volunteer hand crews. Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation helped out with a Recreational Trails Program grant for materials, tools and the costs of the trail cat.

The Sterling Justice Trail; named for the Pocatello Reserve's first Ranger who wore the Forest Service badge in 1905, will be open for business in August of 2013. The trail maintains moderate grades and travels through foothills, maple groves and several rocky ridges as it offers high elevation views of the Portneuf River valley and the city. Some trail switchbacks of the Sterling Justice Trail have rock work and tread work that took over 100 volunteer hours to build. The entire trail has over 3,000 hours of volunteer labor contributed by Eagle Scouts, a Bannock County youth group, CCTUG members and many "walk-in" volunteers who heard about the Sterling Justice Trail and wanted to be a part of it. The new trail completes several loop opportunities with other system trails, making endurance runs and rides more feasible. The Pocatello 50, a 50-mile endurance run that attracts over 800 people to the City of Pocatello will use the trail in 2014. The trail project illustrates that traditional funding sources are not the only way to do business. When Forest Service managers take the time to work with the local public, both parties can get what they want. The power of a good idea to mobilize people can be boundless.

The History Column

In its early days, the Forest Service focused on developing nurseries to raise seedlings for reforestation purposes. Region 4 initially had the Forest Service's two largest nurseries: the Big Cottonwood Canyon nursery near Salt Lake City followed by the Pocatello Planting Station, which was started in 1906 up Mink Creek west of Pocatello, Idaho.

Men planting 3500 Douglas Fir (3 years old). Seedlings on Pocatello NF. 7 planting crews of 2 men each; 1 digs holes with grub hoe & second follow with bucket of trees:

Bannock County, Idaho.

Under the leadership of Peter Wrensted, the first Forest Supervisor of the Pocatello Forest Reserve, personnel grew seedlings for replanting fire-damaged land in southeastern Idaho. At the peak of the nursery's operation, they raised Douglas fir in nine 5' x 70' beds and "yellow pine" (ponderosa pine) in six 5' x 30' beds. The beds were broadcast seeded with seeds from the Payette and the Pocatello forests. The nursery provided trees to the Caribou and Pocatello National Forests as well as to the Payette, Salmon, and Wyoming National Forests.

Early replanting efforts were often less than successful and, with World War I draining staff and funds, many shut down in the late 1910s. As the Pocatello nursery suffered from a lack of manpower and money, plans were made in 1917 to discontinue operations after all stock on hand was disposed. The nursery closed in 1918 but the site continued to serve as the Pocatello district ranger's summer headquarters. Sterling Justice, who became the ranger in 1918, described it in his memoirs:

> The Bannock Ranger Station was a very nice headquarters as it had been built up to a high standard when it was a planting station. . . . The buildings consisted of a five-room dwelling, a two room office building, a bunk house of two large rooms, a four horse barn with hay loft, a garage, warehouse, work shop and an open-front shed for storing machinery, etc. The piped gravity water system from a spring above the station was ample for furnishing irrigating water for the large lawns and some hay. In a separate enclosure was a good horse pasture for a few horses that would not stay with the other horses on the outside.

Original caption: Spading under field peas as a nitrogenous nursery fertilizer at Pocatello nursery.

On the Targhee side, forest officers tried from 1908 to 1912 to establish the Rainey Creek Nursery near Swan Valley. Little is known about the extent of nursery operations—if any—that occurred there.

Richa Wilson, Regional Architectural Historian

Regional Forester's Message

I recently traveled to the Caribou-Targhee National Forest and got to hear about several of the projects displayed in this edition of the Intermountain Trails. I have been enjoying my travels around the Region, meeting employees, and seeing firsthand the outstanding work you are preforming.

As I have traveled around the Region, I have heard concerns from community leaders about the management of National Forests. Perhaps it is the complex nature of the Forest Service's mission – *To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations* – that we experience disparate beliefs among various individuals and groups interested in the management of the National Forest and Grasslands. I am particularly aware of the fact that states in the Intermountain West are exploring other approaches to managing the National Forests.

I want to understand what is behind these concerns. To help us, over the next six to nine months, the Region will engage in an assessment of current perceptions among members of the public, elected officials, employees of various state agencies, and Forest Service employees on the Forest Service and the management of the National Forest System. I refer to the effort as "Exploring Communities of Place."

To assist with this assessment, the Region will use the services of Metropolitan Group, a strategic and creative agency that focuses on communication and engagement strategies. Metropolitan Group is familiar with the Forest Service and I myself have some experience with the company from my days in Region 6.

This effort includes conducting an assessment to understand where there is public excitement and concern about Forest Service presence in communities, identifying opportunities for improving the experience Forest Service offers communities surrounding National Forests, and developing tools and techniques that we can use to improve relationships with communities we serve.

This will be a "whole Region" approach to understanding the communities surrounding National Forests. Fifteen employees from all levels around of the Region will provide advice and council to Metropolitan Group and me on the assessment process. In addition to assessing attitudes in the communities we serve, Metropolitan Group will also assess attitudes among employees through a series of listening session throughout the Region.

I am very excited about this opportunity to explore our communities of place. I encourage hope you will participate so that we might better understand and serve all who are interested in the National Forests and Grasslands of the Intermountain Region.

Nora